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## Kid's Heavy Backpacks *are a Pain in the Back...*

It's back to school time again. A sure sign of this is seeing children trudging to and from school carrying their backpacks. Homework, textbooks and other school supplies quickly fill a child's bag. It is remarkable to see how many items children squeeze into their backpacks.

Unfortunately, hauling a heavy backpack repeatedly can injure a child's developing spine. As a result of this strain, symptoms may result varying from headaches to discomfort in the shoulders, neck or back. Studies have indicated that up to 50% of children experience back pain by their teenage years. These statistics are very concerning because these aches and pains are often ignored. When left untreated they can progress to chronic complaints later in life.

Wearing a backpack improperly is also an important issue. For example, using only one strap leads to an uneven distribution of the load being carried. The individual will compensate by tilting their upper body and neck to support the unevenly distributed weight. As a result postural distortions may occur throughout the spine leading to muscle imbalances. Overloaded backpacks are a cause of neck and back complaints in many school-aged children who seek Chiropractic care. It's important to recognize the correct way to choose, pack and carry a backpack.

Here are some recommendations to follow when fitting your child's backpack:

1) According to the British Columbia Chiropractic Association children should carry no more than 10% – 15% of their body weight in their backpacks.



2) Choose a backpack with shoulder straps at least two inches wide. They should be adjustable so the backpack can be fitted properly. Encourage your child to use both straps instead of slinging the backpack over one shoulder.

3) Backpacks with a hip strap will keep heavier loads closer to the body and help avoid back strain.

4) Consider a pack with individualized compartments. This will enable you to evenly distribute the weight of the contents.

5) Teach your child to pack the heaviest items closest to the body and odd shaped items on the outside.

6) Discourage your child from carrying a heavy backpack while in-line skating, skateboarding or bicycling.

7) Encourage children to pick up and drop off heavy books at their lockers between classes.

**Follow these tips and take a load off your child's back and your own too.**

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